

THESIS

NON-OBJECTIVE, TWO-DIMENSIONAL, MULTI-PLANAR SPACE
VIA LINE, FORM AND COLOR

Submitted by
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In partial fulfillment of the requirements
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Colorado State University
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WE HEREBY RECOMMEND THAT THE THESIS PREPARED UNDER OUR SUPERVISION
BY ROSANNA RADDING
ENTITLED NON-OBJECTIVE, TWO-DIMENSIONAL, MULTI-PLANAR SPACE
VIA LINE, FORM AND COLOR
BE ACCEPTED AS FULFILLING IN PART REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF FINE ARTS

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ABSTRACT OF THESIS

NON-OBJECTIVE, TWO-DIMENSIONAL, MULTI-PLANAR SPACE

VIA LINE, FORM AND COLOR

Transcendence of the inherent flat orientation of a two-dimensional format and interrelation of opposites are the major objectives of my work. Visual references are extended through line, color and shape enabling one's eye to negotiate through, over and around shapes, both positive and negative, and to perceive the multi-level penetration of space. Line, color washes and calligraphic motifs in relation to the unprimed canvas on which they are painted break-up, dissolve and make fixed forms transparent for other forms lying behind them. The painting surface involves a multiplicity of moving form. The entirety is in motion seldom allowing the viewer to rest on any one visual point. The longer one looks the more one sees.

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Three-dimensional spatial depth achieved on a flat surface is an imaged or sensed space which is created as an illusion by various painting techniques and their specific application as dictated by my philosophical references. Although the techniques are simply done (descriptions of which will follow as needed) they are not simple in their utilization. Straight hard edges versus ragged, dry-brushed edges versus thick to thin paint suggest forms, hidden and obvious relationships and visual order. Energies, tensions, restful passages and the consociation thereof, create a space in which the opposition between object and emptiness no longer exists by virtue of their ambiguity.

I have chosen to work on unprimed canvas because of its intrinsic raw warmth, textural qualities and virgin surface which accepts stains readily as they become a part of the cloth, rather than standing on top of it as on primed canvas. When used as an open expanse the untouched, untreated canvas amplifies the aforementioned ambiguity of object and emptiness. This happens because the viewer is not instructed by a given paint application or color as to what that area is specifically to do. Therefore what it does not do is equally as important. What is not seen bears the same weight as what is, and the longer one looks the more one sees these interdependencies of painted and raw canvas.

By the use of unprimed canvas I am predisposed to use acrylic polymer paints as my medium. Unlike oil paints the acrylics will not

rot the canvas. Nonetheless, for my work, the choice of acrylic paint arises out of more than necessities of conservation.

The fast drying characteristics of acrylic paint allow me to work quickly and spontaneously, acting on impulse more readily without extended drying times to work around. One must be aware, however, that once these paints and mediums dry they are permanent and must be incorporated rather than eliminated from within a painting; though in some instances an opaque paint application may suitably cover up the questionable area.

This permanence combined with the raw canvas and the spontaneous nature of my technical approach makes risk a formidable partner. There are no preliminary drawings or plans. The painting unfolds step by step on the canvas and begins to assert itself, guiding me as the artist. Decisions, though directed by technical and aesthetic knowledge, are founded in intuition. Often this allows the breaking of rules both in compositional and color considerations.

Size, shape and direction of the stretched canvas, though not random, is within a varied range of standards. Sizes are generally no smaller than 3½ feet by 4 feet and may extend to nothing larger than 5 feet by 5 feet. The square, elongated rectangle, and diamond shape predominate. The specific direction of the rectangle, vertical or horizontal, serves to reiterate the directional quality of the composition and visa-versa. An example of this is in Figure 15 where the long, narrow horizontal sweep of the calligraphic stroke compliments the same long narrowness of the overall canvas.

Within the paintings themselves, size and shape references vary greatly creating an interest and often a tension between opposites,

i.e., large and small, angular and curved, etc. For instance in the painting in Figure 18 there is a $\frac{1}{2}$ inch by $\frac{1}{2}$ inch area of opaque paint set within a 4 feet by 4 feet canvas of which the internal structure deals mainly with relatively large areas. The compositional value of this opaque square, when visualized, may seem almost negligible but such small elements serve as pictorial punctuation. Just as using such punctuation serves a purpose, so does excluding some elements. Here one enters the realm of understatement when, as in the analogy of an uncrossed "t" or undotted "i", although unfinished, there is an understanding of meaning. The element left out is often unnecessary because it is implied by other components in the painting. Here again a feeling of tension is often created.

The combined factors of understatement and tension are crucial to the success of my paintings. Once more this relates to, or stems from the previously mentioned philosophy that what is not seen, or what is subtly suggested potentially carries the same importance and/or impact as what is visually and identifiably pronounced.

Color is one of the key concerns, as is line and the specific technical applications of both. The paintings in Figures 1 and 2 can be cited as major developments in the progression of my work in all of these aspects. Although I had previously worked on raw canvas these are the first instances where the unworked canvas is more than incidental, taking on a significant presence of its own as juxtaposed against the painted surface. Large areas of color are created by staining. The stains are small amounts of paint suspended in a water and gloss medium base. Characteristically these stains are transparent allowing visual levels or planes to be established with successive

applications of like or different color. Crisp, hard edges of the stained areas, and of line work are accomplished by taping and sealing the edges with gloss medium.

Another technique that increased in usage and value to the overall composition in these early paintings is medium resist. Gloss medium, either straight or watered down slightly, is applied directly to the painting and allowed to dry. In effect this seals that portion of the canvas no longer allowing paint to penetrate. The resist area becomes "milky" in appearance when a wash is pulled over it. In later paintings this technique is used more in a linear fashion, i.e., Figure 15.

The color usage that began to predominate at this early stage of my work involved less heavy tube color and more light, airy pastel hues. Color combinations retained their "off beat," unpredictable nature often functioning as an element of surprise. My long time fascination with color manifests itself in my attitude of feeling free to "experiment with" and invent color in a multitude of ways. Particular color choice in any given painting, though once again carefully calculated, involves a degree of intuition. When dealing with the effect of "layered" transparencies changes in both color and value are taken into consideration. Often as a preliminary test, overlays are tried on a swatch of canvas before they are applied to the painting. In this way there is at least a vague notion of the final outcome.

Beginning first as simple curved strokes the calligraphic images in my work have evolved into free-flowing, spirited parts of the whole. Progressively they have become more important both in size and in relation to the development of the entire painting. With only three exceptions, Figures 3, 7, 15, the first paint laid on the canvas has

been a calligraphic figure. Done without specific source material the earlier calligraphic images are basically the same stroke repeated with limited directional and size variations. Figures 9 and 10 are the first instances of paintings where a specific source was used. At this time, for greater variety, I began referring to several books on Chinese calligraphy. Initial forms were extracted from these books and translated onto my canvas often bearing minimal likeness to the original character.

The choice of a particular figure is based on its inherent movement and relationship of forms. Those are the qualities that prompted my use of calligraphic entities in my work in general. The energy and motion of these boldly "written" strokes are played against static, hard edges that often become broken into or interrupted. This antonymous nature of freedom and constraint subtly exploits another form of tension. Here it almost seems veiled, lurking just behind what the viewer sees.

The technical applications of these calligraphic strokes reiterate the philosophical notions involved. Each stroke is directly "written" onto the canvas. Ragged, dry-brushed edges, random drops, though they are held to a minimum, and fusing of two or more colors are contrasted against formal edge, line and shape. In some instances edges seem to fade into the canvas rather than being emphatically abrupt.

Fusing of color was first introduced into my vocabulary of techniques with the painting in Figure 3, but was not used extensively until five or six paintings later. The fusion of colors is achieved when varying colors in an aqueous state are butted against each other or one painted directly on top of another. The degree of fusing that

occurs can be regulated slightly by wetness and/or dryness of the canvas and original stroke. Direction can be modified by tilting the entire canvas one way or another. Extremely dramatic effects or almost subliminal ones can be arrived at through choice of color. Strong color differentiation creates a more visually obvious fusion than similar colors do.

Whether blatant or subtle this fusion of color functions in the realm of visual nuance in accordance with all that has been mentioned previously. Distinguishable or indistinguishable edges and forms are created, and an airy sense of atmosphere and mobility of spatial references and inconstant plane structure occurs. Similarly the colors themselves become wedded producing a myriad of chromatic variations.

Hard edge line plays an integral role as a counteragent to less restrictive elements and also as a modifier of two-dimensional visual space. Within some of my paintings, i.e., Figures 12, 13, the illusion of multiple planes is created by the "stacking" of transparent paint applications of a non-linear nature. However, much the same result is achieved by the direct use of line. Often line, when used in this fashion, works as an optical effect. Slight curvature of a line or its placement in relation to the picture plane, as in Figures 8, 9, can alter the appearance of the stretched canvas itself causing it to look less than properly constructed. This is an illusion of one sort. Another, used more frequently, is that of a line passing under, over or penetrating another form or line. In the painting in Figure 16 a yellow line that passes in back of the blue shadow form causes that form to come forward and rest in its own plane, apart from other planes

within the painting. The line has modified the structural illusion of space. Another example of this manipulation of space through line is apparent in Figure 18. The line on the upper right weaves over and under the appendages of the calligraphic figure alluding to a third dimension.

Still another use of line is as a self-contained unit ungrounded and floating in space. Examples of this are in Figure 17 where the line forms a closed rectangular shape against a background of similar tonality, and in Figure 15 where a thin, nearly 90° angular line is seemingly suspended mid-composition. Ambiguities arise and diminish and paintings appearing essentially flat at first glance divulge inconspicuous spatial relationships as the viewer continues to look. There is a sense of ongoing discovery. The more one looks the more one sees, even in the simplest of compositions.

Containment and "escape," edge and centrality are two more antonymous aspects critical to my work. They are to be considered together because of their interrelationship to each other. As much careful attention is paid to the outer limits of my canvases as to the mid-sections. Spatial and technical considerations of the perimeters of the canvas implore the viewer to expose himself or herself to the entirety of the work sometimes released beyond its boundaries and sometimes held captive by them. Similarly boundaries of specific parts within any given painting often function as both positive and negative entities. "Limitless enclosure," though a vague contradiction of terms, best defines such applications. Seldom is an area fully contained. Adherent to the quality of ambiguity, a line or form will usually stop

just short of closure or will lead off into undefined space. Such is the case in Figures 17 and 18.

Framing three sides by a heavy $\frac{1}{2}$ inch wide mauve toned border, the containing element of the painting in Figure 11 functions differently than in most of the other bordered or semi-bordered paintings. The calligraphic form and vast pastel yellow expanse seem afloat on the surface of the canvas. It is the border that anchors the whole composition and brings it back into itself rather than allowing it to flow off into space. Still, the third side, the open side encourages a sense of freedom and is carried almost imperceptively up into the painting by the approximately $\frac{1}{4}$ inch strip of raw canvas that remains between the border and yellow form.

I have herein presented the parts of the whole, in effect describing paintings or, conceptually, "the" painting which embodies all for which I have striven. Specific criteria and projected conclusions have been delineated and serve to expound upon my intent. The paintings themselves speak clearly of said criteria and conclusions harmoniously uniting oppositions of form and of intellectual and/or spiritual considerations and material perceptions. It remains true within the realm of my work and my life that there is always more to be seen.

Fig. 1. Acrylic paint on raw canvas. $48\frac{1}{2}$ x $56\frac{1}{2}$ inches.

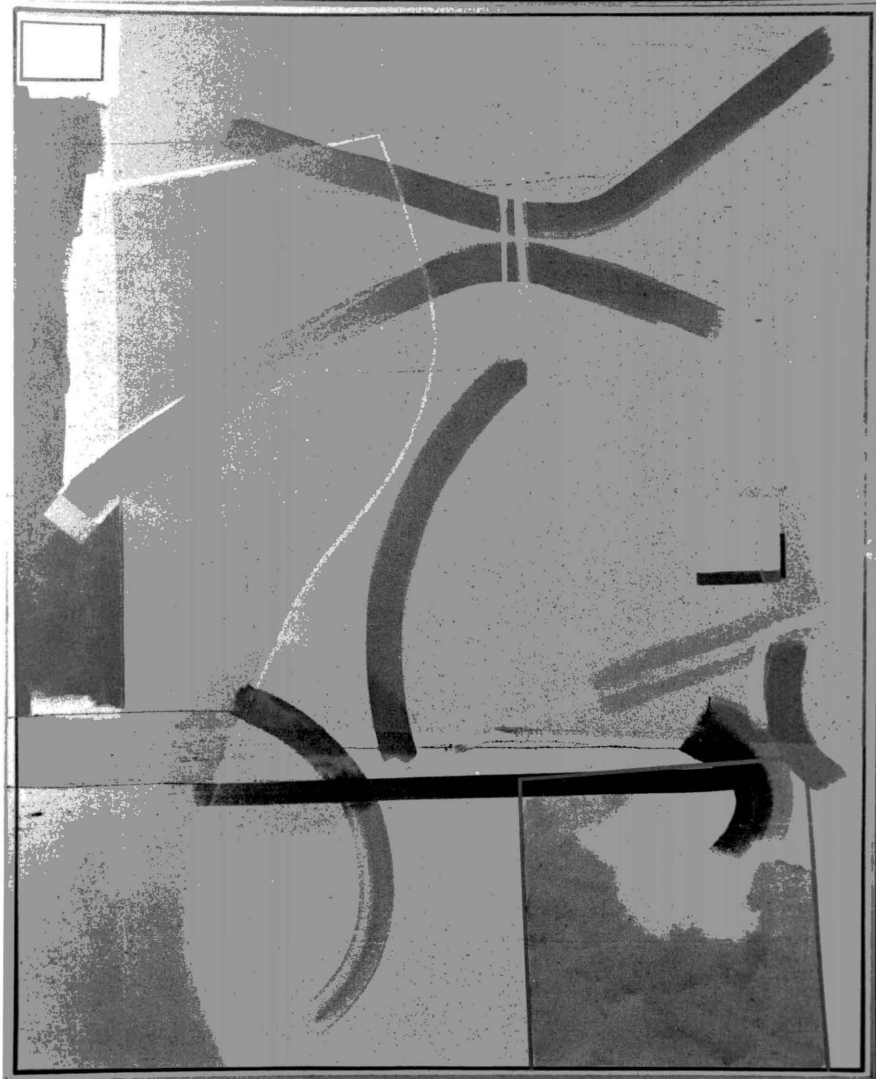


Fig. 2. Acrylic paint on raw canvas. 54 x 54 inches.

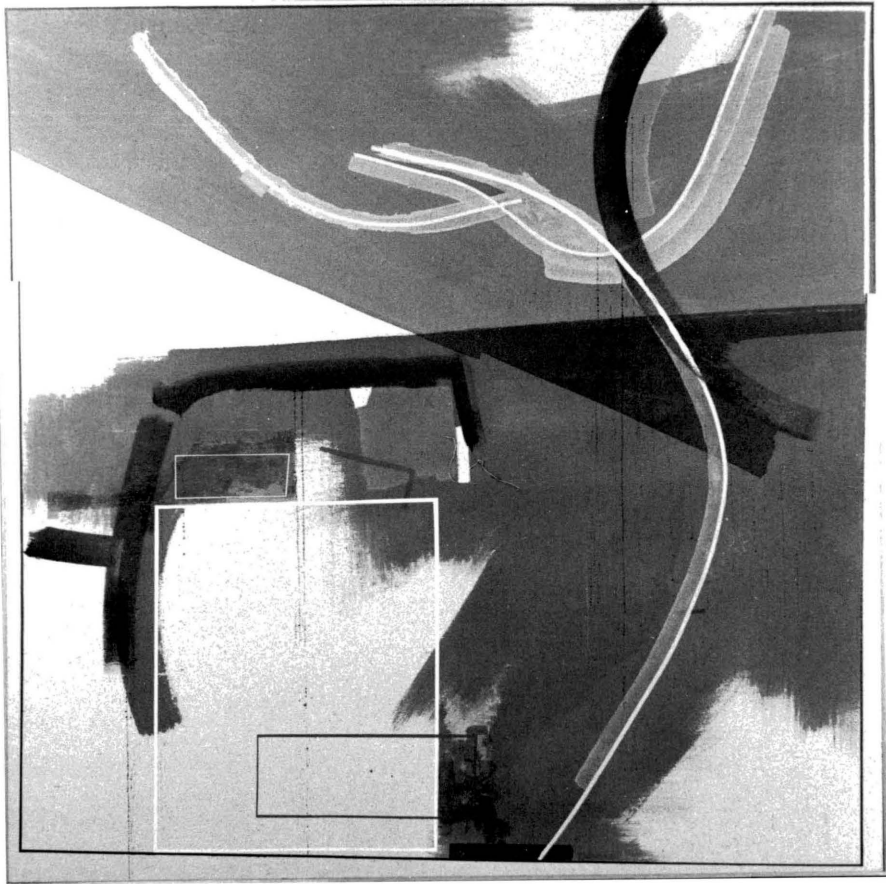


Fig. 3. Acrylic paint on raw canvas. 39 x 39 inches.

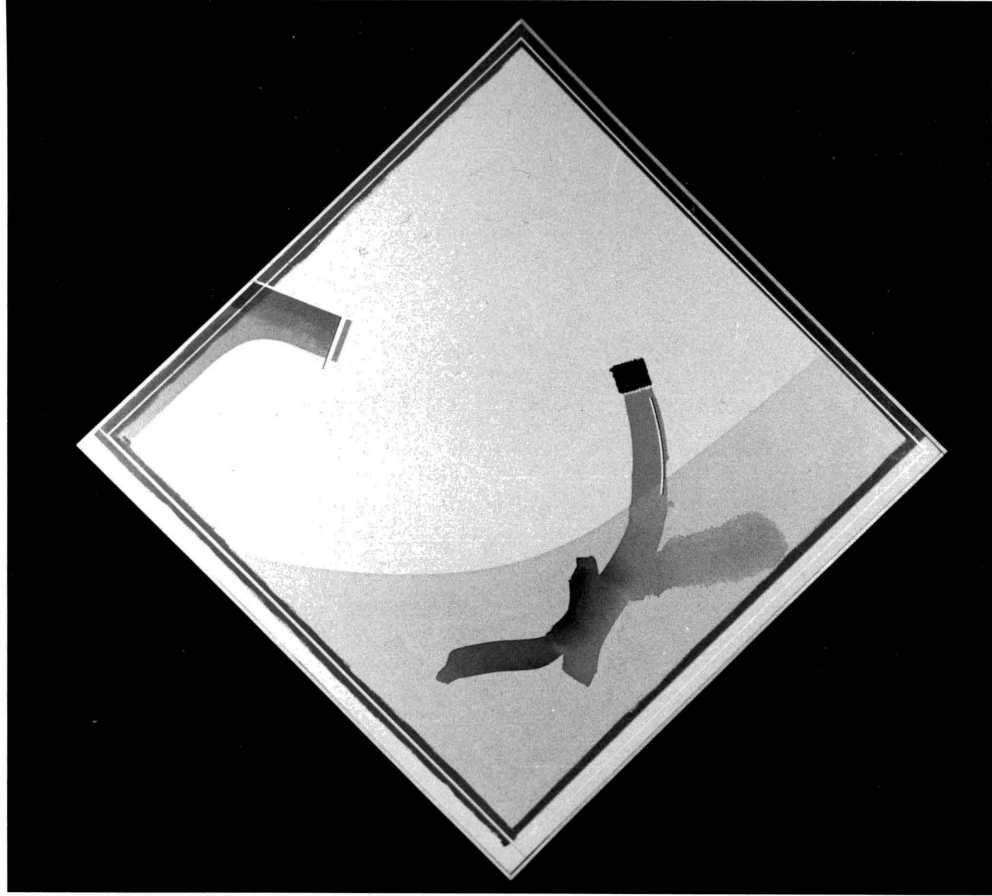


Fig. 4. Acrylic paint on raw canvas. $42\frac{1}{4}$ x $42\frac{1}{4}$ inches.

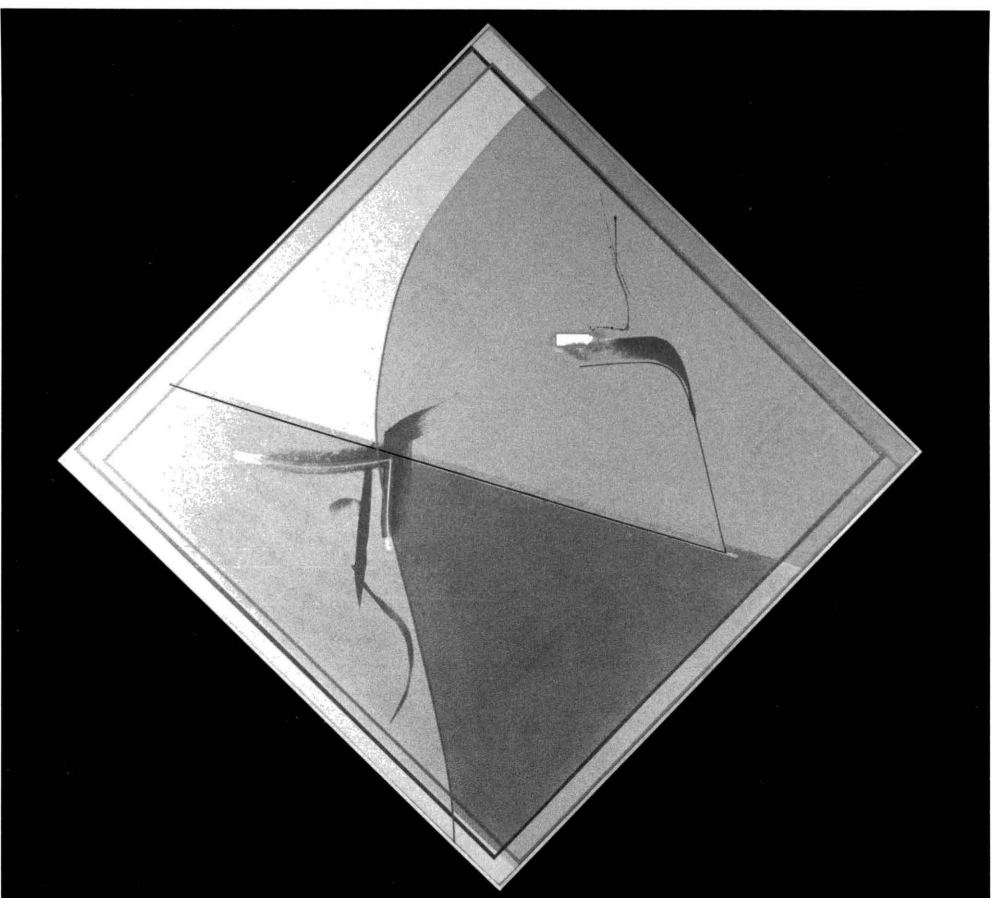


Fig. 5. Acrylic paint on raw canvas. 54 x 48 inches.

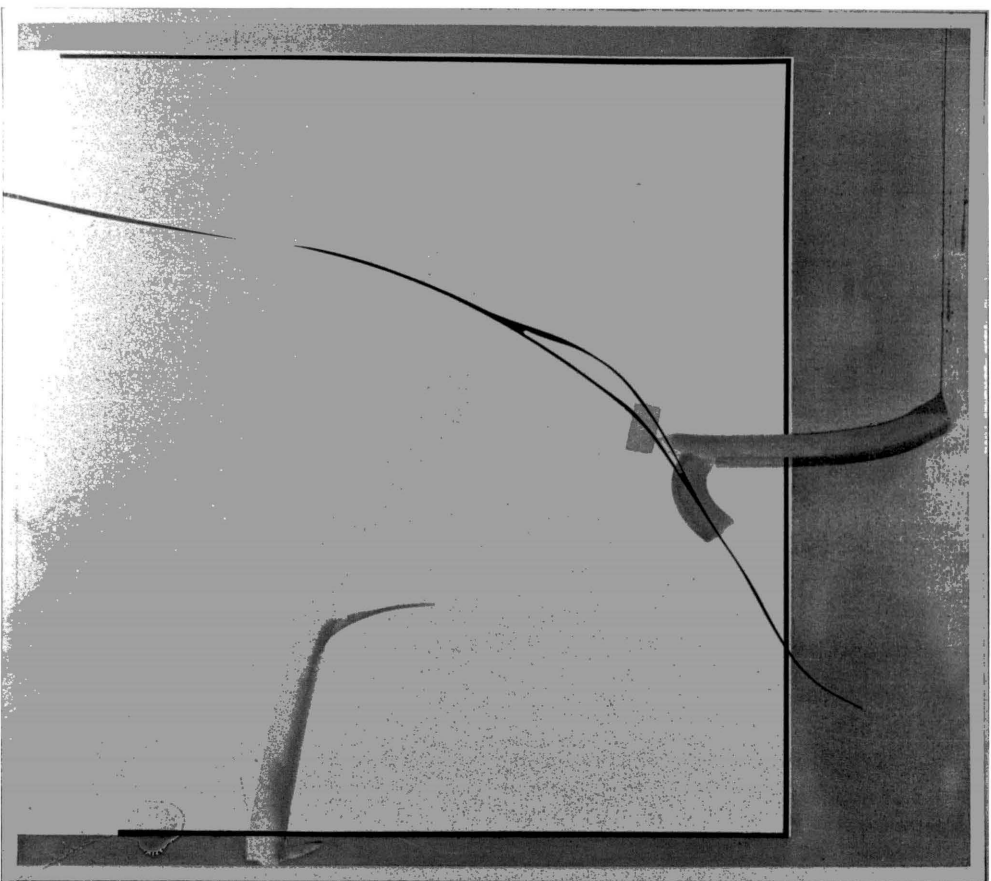


Fig. 6. Acrylic paint on raw canvas. 54 x 48 inches.

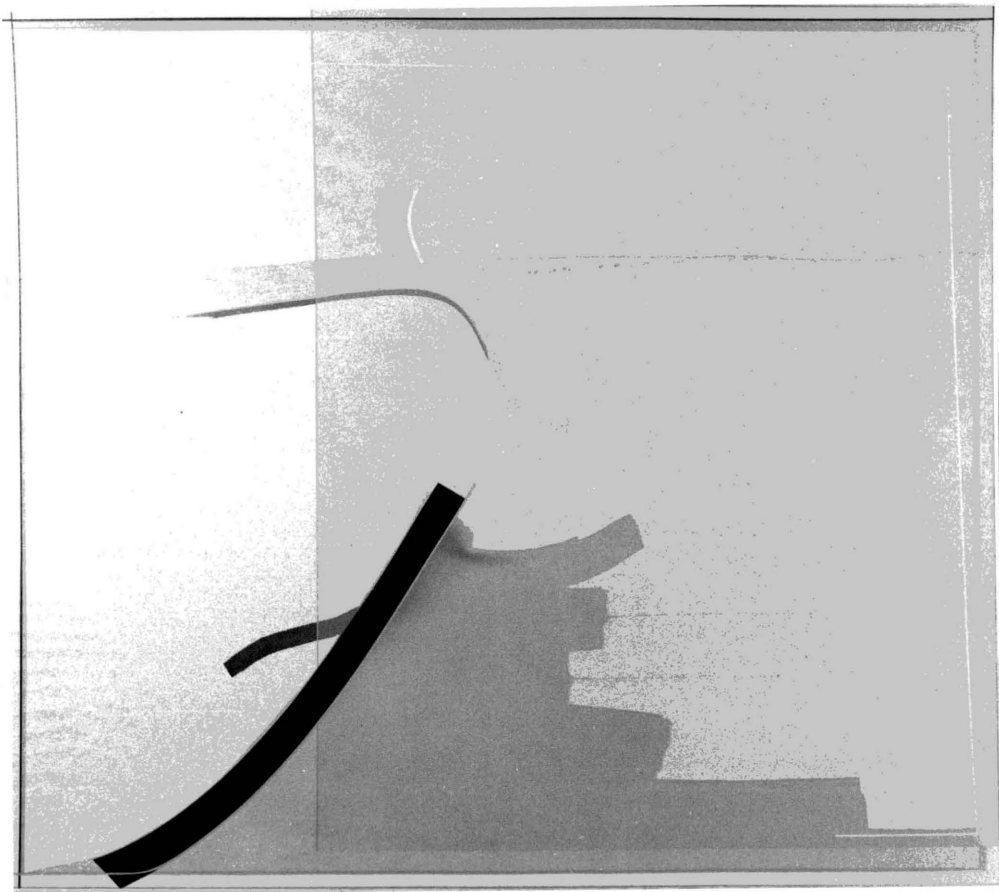


Fig. 7. Acrylic paint on raw canvas. $49\frac{1}{2}$ x $49\frac{1}{2}$ inches.

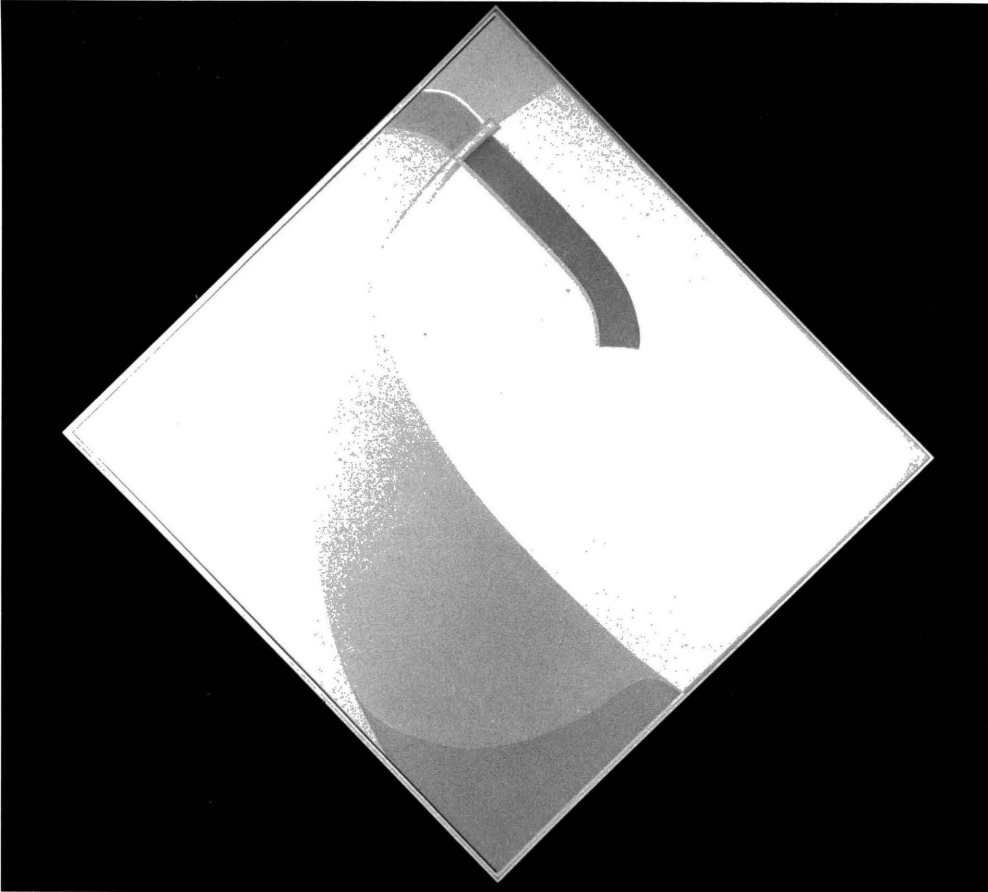


Fig. 8. Acrylic paint on raw canvas. 48 x 48 inches.

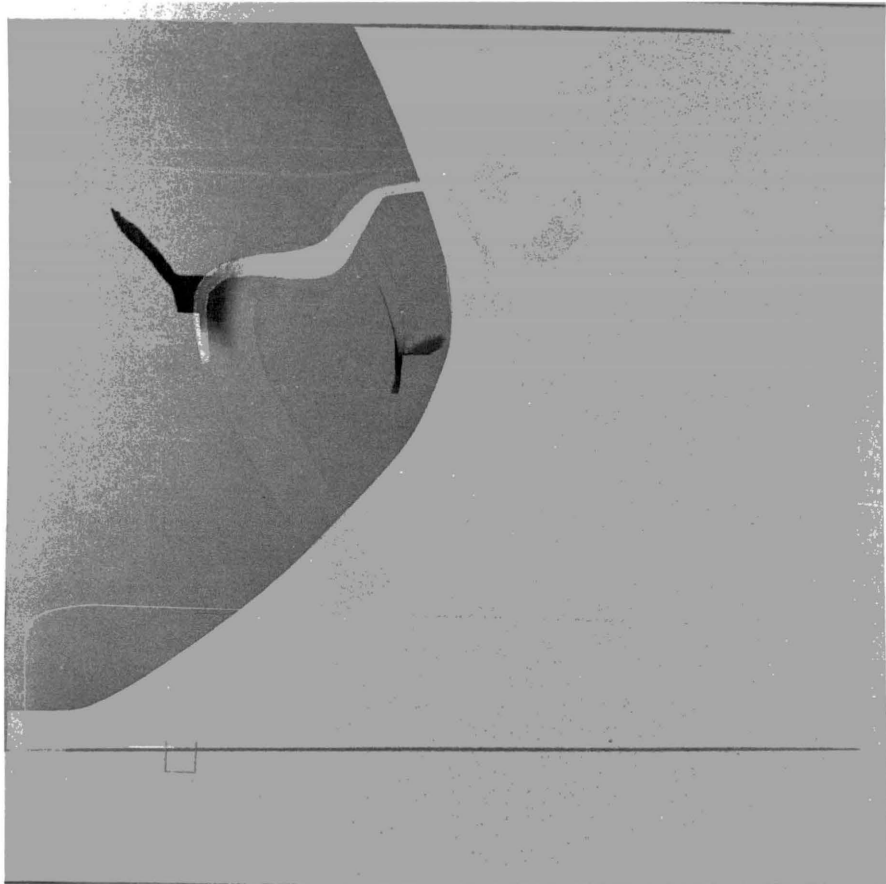
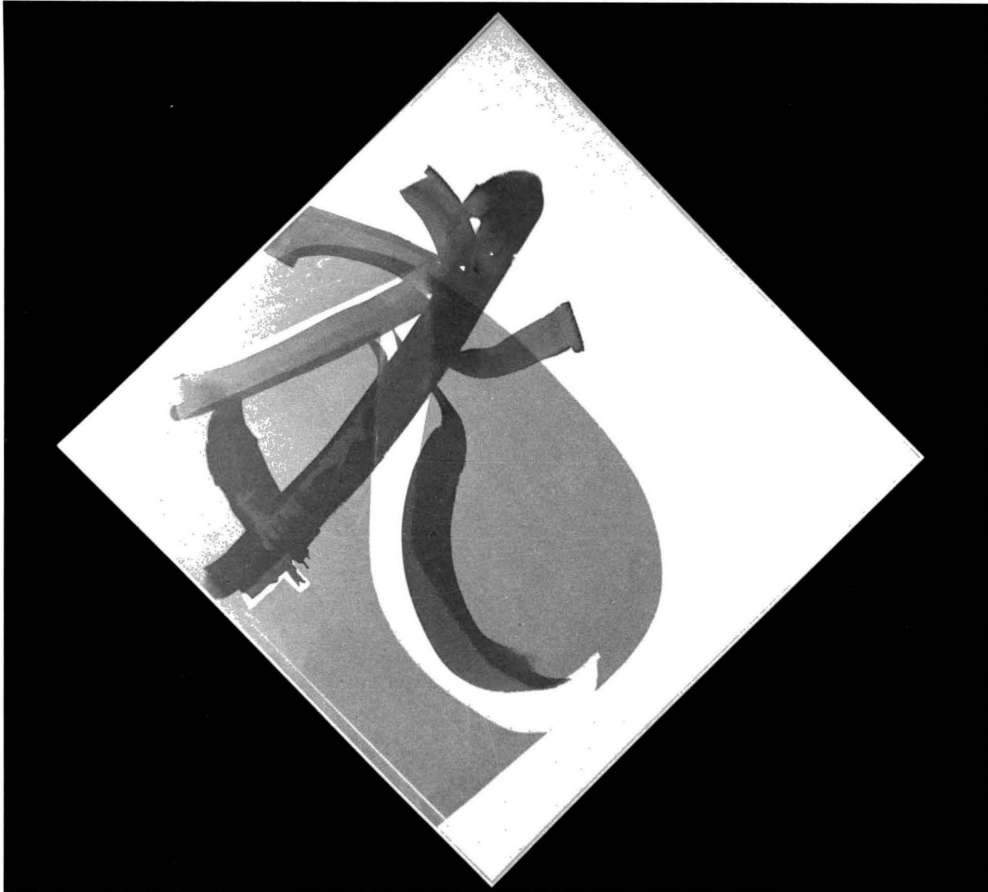


Fig. 9. Acrylic paint on raw canvas. 48 x 48 inches.






Fig. 10. Acrylic paint on raw canvas. 66 x 41 inches.



Fig. 11. Acrylic paint on raw canvas. 54 x 48 inches.



Fig. 12. Acrylic paint on raw canvas. 48 x 48 inches.

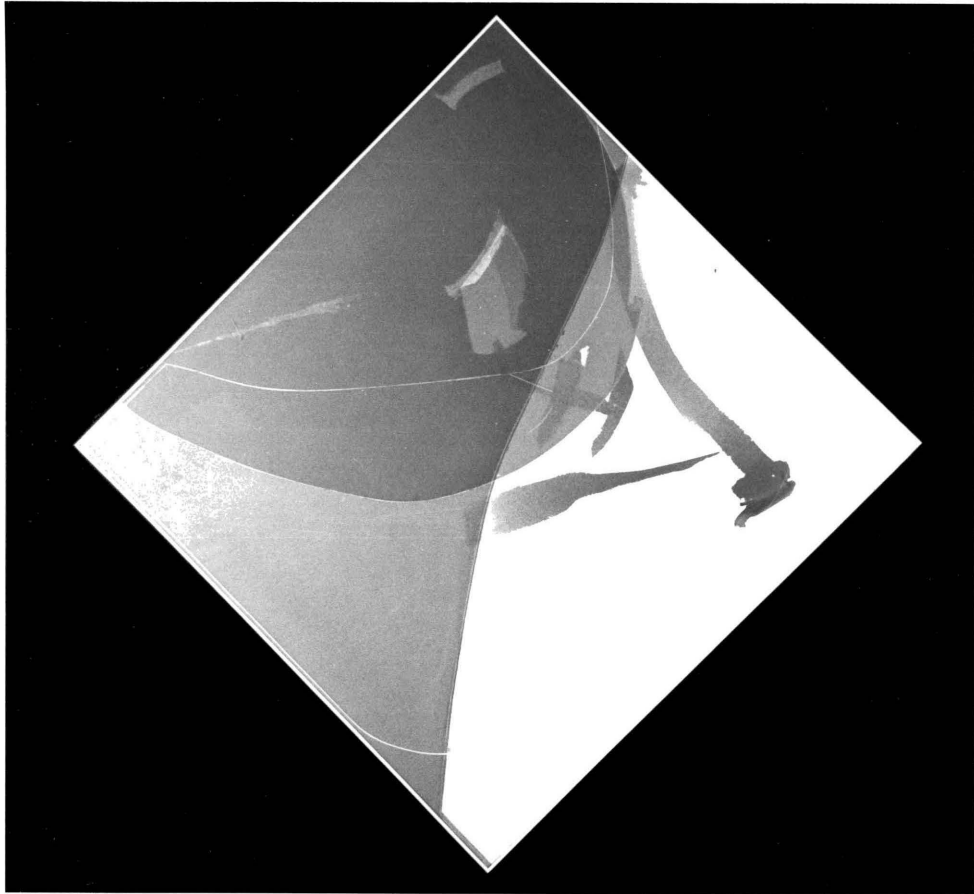


Fig. 13. Acrylic paint on raw canvas. 60 x 39½ inches.



Fig. 14. Acrylic paint on raw canvas. 48 x 48 inches.

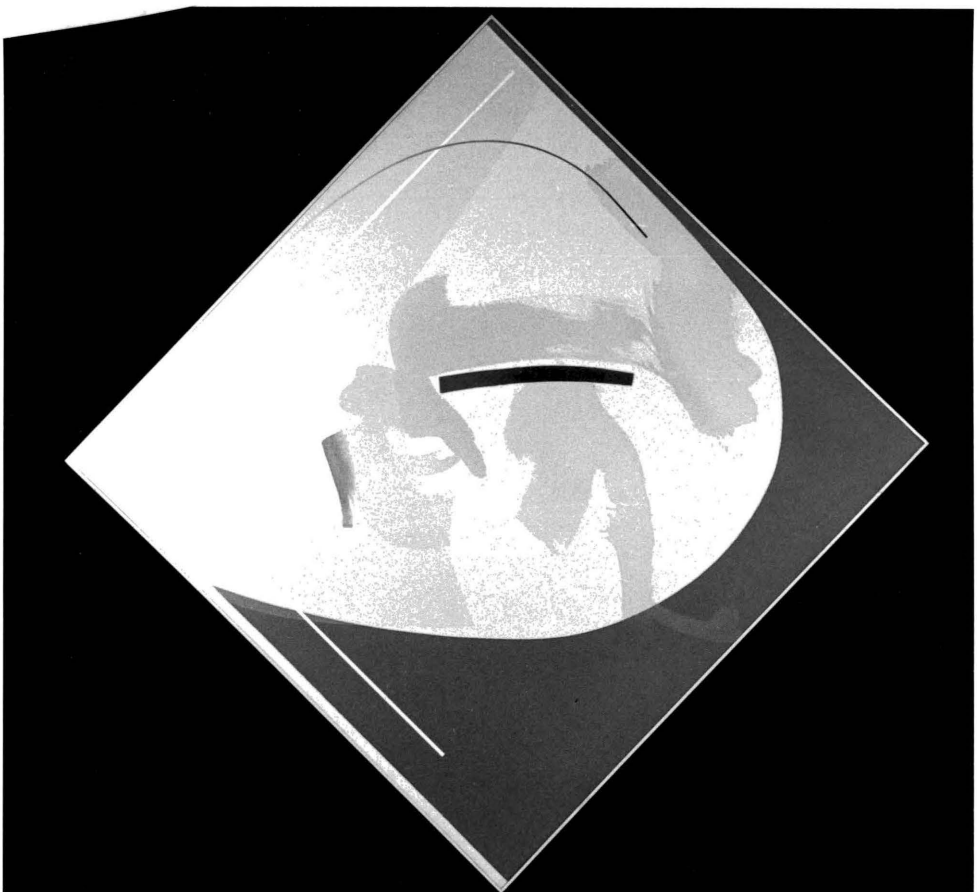


Fig. 15. Acrylic paint on raw canvas. 60 x 39½ inches.

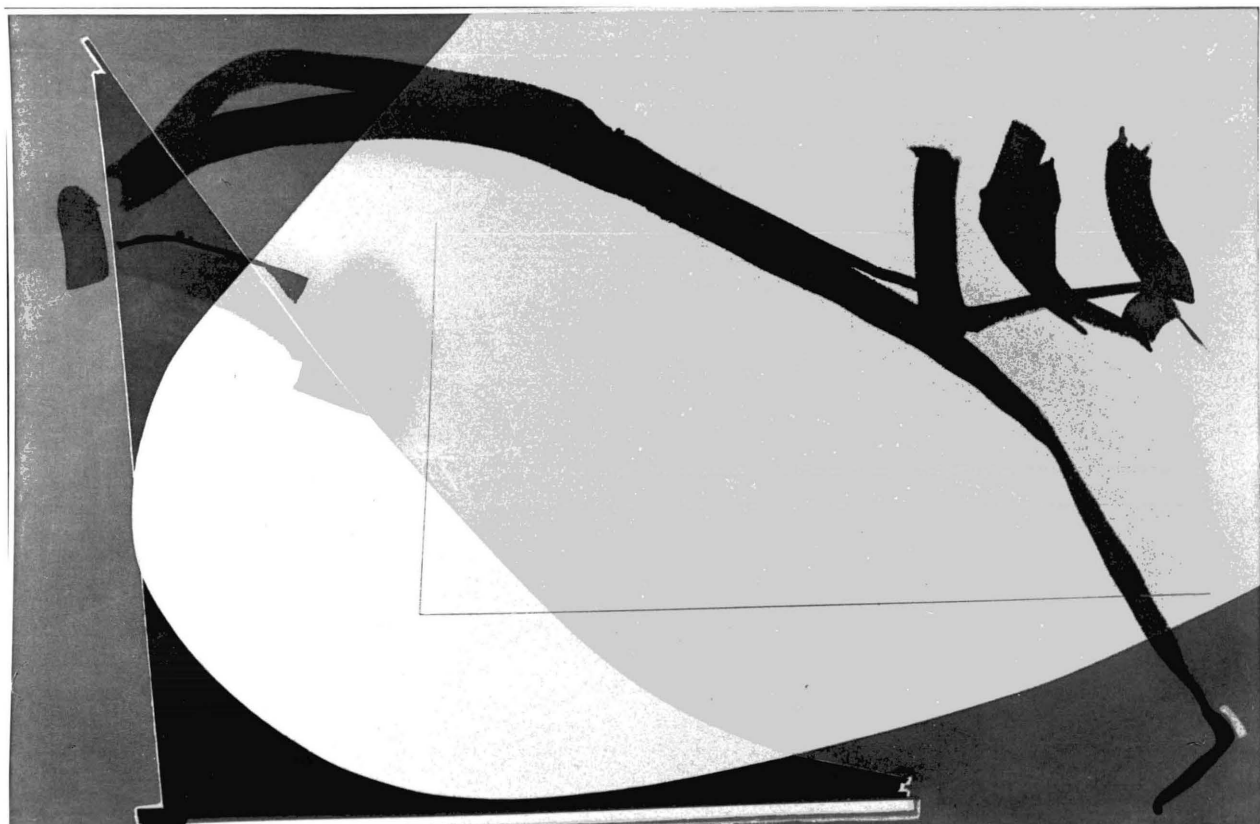


Fig. 16. Acrylic paint on raw canvas. $45\frac{1}{2}$ x 51 inches.



Fig. 17. Acrylic paint on raw canvas. 48 x 53 3/4 inches.

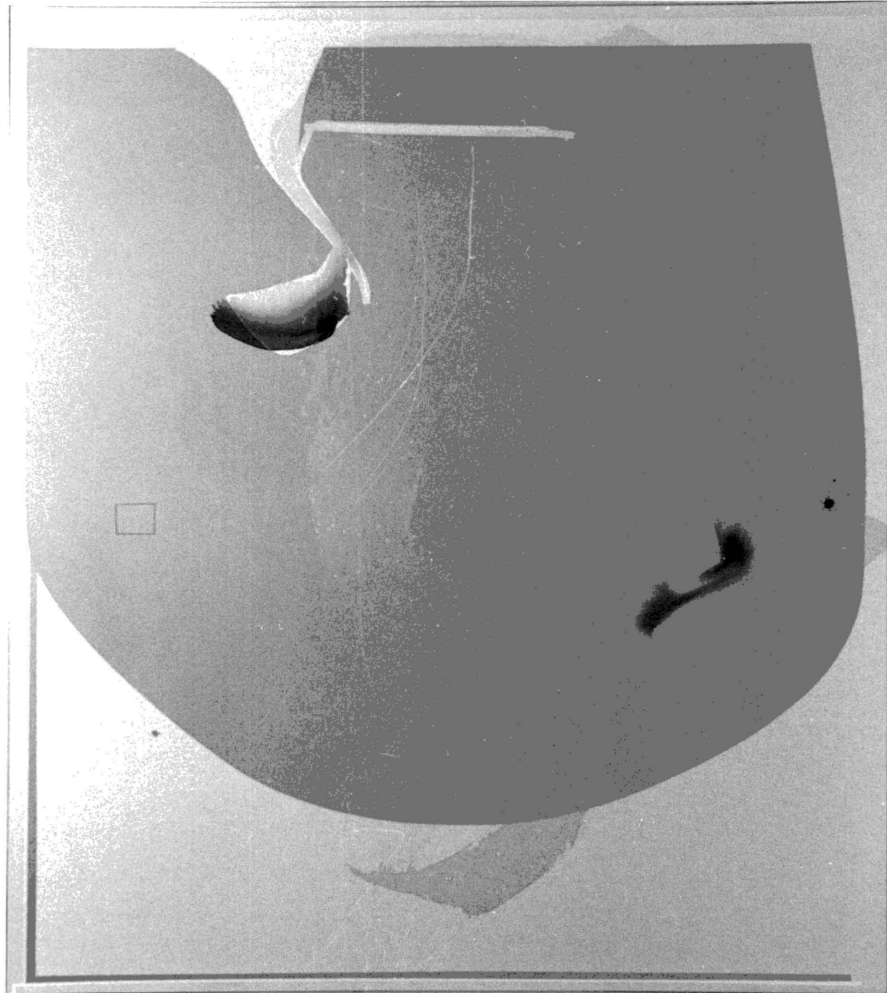


Fig. 18. Acrylic paint on raw canvas. 48 x 48 inches.

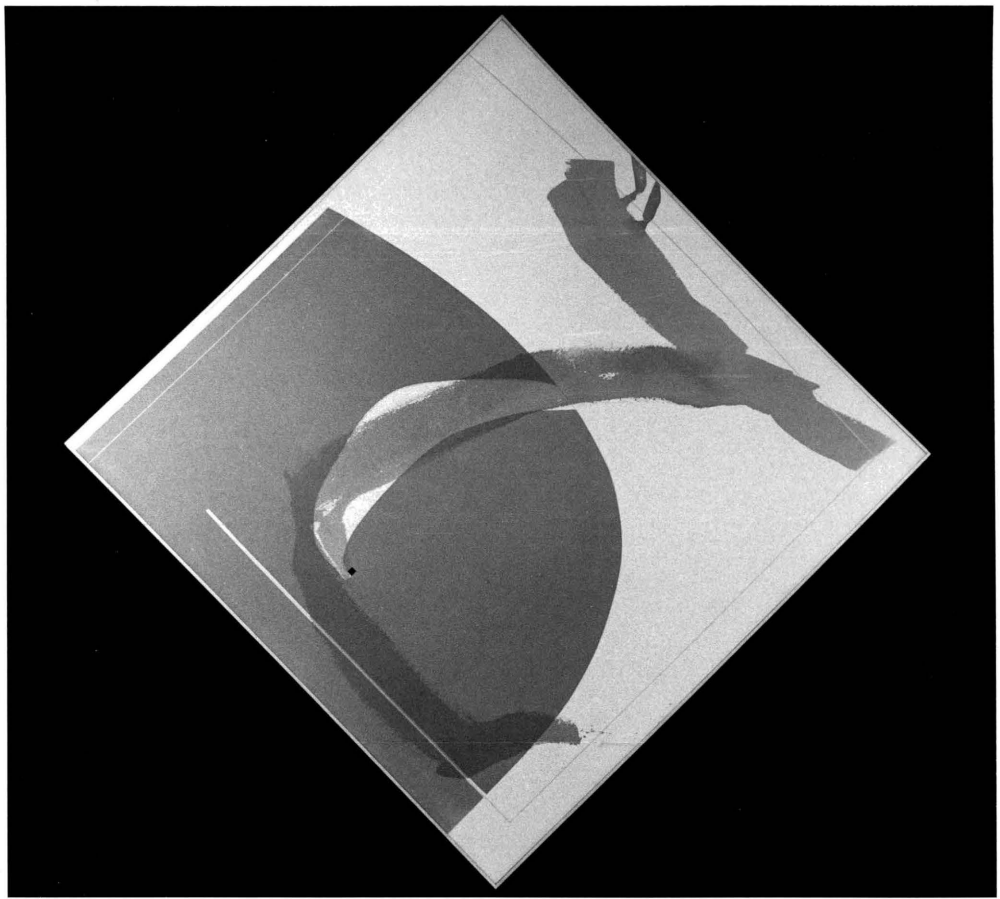


Fig. 19. Acrylic paint on raw canvas. 45 x 51 inches.

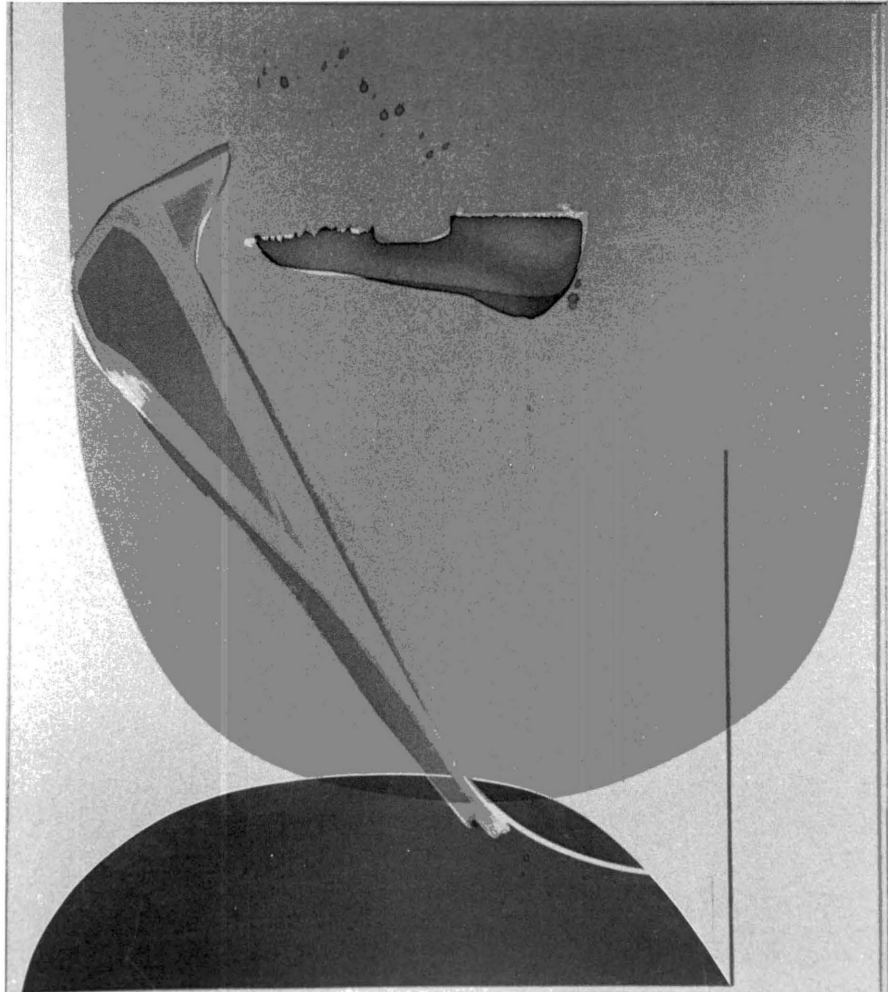


Fig. 20. Acrylic paint on raw canvas. 60 x 60 inches.

